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ABSTRACT

By integrating the language arts across the curriculum, teachers and librarians can help students make connections between what they already know and new material. Teachers committed to this approach need to spend time planning, executing, and evaluating the process and to bring the following essential components to the classroom: (1) love and respect for children, (2) love of both adult and children's books, (3) willingness to share reading with children and to listen to their comments, (4) imagination and curiosity, and (5) time and flexibility. Students can benefit from class projects assisted by a librarian. By reviewing such sources as "Children's Catalog" and "The Horn Book," the librarian can assemble a selection of books from various genres addressing different aspects of the subject being studied. The class should be consulted for ideas. Biographical information on the authors can be provided. Weekly vocabulary lists can be developed from the readings and teachers and students can keep logs to record comments about the learning experience. (The appended bibliography is based on the example of a class project in American history, and contains notations indicating reading and interest level, and whether the book is fiction, nonfiction, legend or folktale, poetry, adventure, humor, or fantasy.) (JD)

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by Jean Stevenson

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Weaving Connections With Language Arts

By Jean Stevenson
Grand Forks, ND

Teachers and librarians have for centuries been helping students make connections between what students already know and new material. Connections expand knowledge. They build on what children, teachers and librarians already know. Making connections is a bit like weaving cloth with the warp threads stretching across the loom: the weaver adds crosswise threads or weft until the cloth grows and fills the loom. The weaver determines the colors used, the size and the resulting pattern. The warp threads are the knowledge already there. The weft threads are the things teachers, librarians and children add as they read, write, talk, listen and share experiences together. The resulting fabric is woven by many weavers and is different for each weaver.

Integrating language arts across the curriculum is an excellent way to help students begin to make connections. In separating the strands of the fabric into individual skills or subjects which are taught in isolation, the fabric or whole is weakened or destroyed.

Destruction of the fabric can occur when there is no relationship between the subjects taught in a given day. Donald Graves terms this "the cha-cha-cha curriculum." During a "typical" school day, children may:

- *Complete worksheets from the language arts text.*
- *Meet with a reading group and read a story.*
- *Fill in blanks or do exercises based on the story.*
- *Begin reading a new chapter in the social studies text followed by a discussion of what was read.*
- *Watch a demonstration lesson in math and do problems based on the lesson.*
- *Read and discuss a portion of a chapter from the science text or watch a film or demonstration.*

After each activity, papers are passed forward and collected. Not included in this compilation are visits to the library, gym, music teacher or counselor. Time is spent taking attendance and collecting lunch tickets. Individual children come and go for help from the reading specialist or learning disabilities teacher. Lunch and recess also serve to break up the day. None of the varied activities is related to what preceded it or followed it.

If the teacher wants to eliminate the regimented movement from one subject to another and is committed to using language arts across the curriculum, the teacher needs to spend some time thinking about possibilities. It is helpful to keep a notebook and pencil nearby to write down ideas. Because this is a constantly evolving process, the notebook will be useful in planning, executing and evaluating the process. Some things to consider and/or ask are:

- *What do I want to cover?*
- *How do I want to involve the children?*
- *What are the curriculum requirements?*
- *Do I want or need to use the school-provided texts If so, how and what portions?*
- *What is the time frame? How long do I wish this to last?*
- *What trade books am I familiar with that I want to use? What are the reading levels of my students? Are there class sets of some of the books available?*
- *What resources does the library (school and public) have to offer? If given "warning" and a bit of time, will the librarian be able to provide materials for the students to use in the classroom and also help teachers and students search for additional materials?*
- *How do I want to present the information? Will some of the material be read to the students or by students, in small groups, or by one or two students and then shared with the class?*
- *What sorts of activities do I want to involve the students in? Will I need to order or provide special materials [art supplies, ingredients for cooking, "scrap" from home (milk and egg cartons, styrofoam trays, etc.)] to carry out my activities?*
- *What sort of writing activities do I want my students to become involved in?*
- *How do I evaluate the process? Will I be keeping a teaching journal? Will I ask the students to keep a journal chronicling their journey of discovery?*

Students can be wonderful sources of ideas and materials. They can be included in the planning and extension of the subject(s) to be studied. If students are included, what is being studied may begin to reflect some of their interests, tastes in literature and feelings. If children have a vested interest in what they are learning, they become actively involved in it. Approach the class ahead of time, present them with a word (e.g., *frontier* or *pioneer*), give them five minutes to think and then ask them to write down what comes to mind. Ask everyone to share one idea from his/her paper. Write the suggestions on the board. Ask a student to act as scribe and make a copy of what is written on the board.

Collect the suggestions the students have written down. Go on from there. (The idea for doing a web in this way comes from Pat Carini of The Prospect School.)

There is no magic potion which a teacher can take that will help the teacher make connections. However, there are several components or ingredients which a teacher can bring to the classroom that will facilitate the making of connections.

A love and respect for all children is essential. Along with this comes a knowledge of the interests and abilities of the students in a given classroom. It is necessary to recognize that not all children in a given grade will come possessing identical skills or be "at grade level." Some will be below and others will be well above.

A love of reading both books and materials for adults and children is necessary. The interest in children's literature can be fueled by reading children's books and such publications as: The Horn Book, Language Arts and Children's Literature in Education.

A compulsion to share what has been and is being read with children and adults is a necessary aspect of reading.

It is essential that there is a willingness to listen to what children have to say about the book(s) they have read or are reading. Respect for and appreciation of the ideas and opinions voiced by children are part of the willingness to listen. Children will develop the ability to accept differing opinions, if that is modeled for them by teachers, librarians and parents.

A dash of imagination and a dollop of curiosity are absolutely necessary when making connections.

Teachers and librarians need an infinite amount of time and a willingness to alter plans when things don't work, take more time and energy than they have in the past or originally planned, or when students' excitement, interest and ideas cause changes to be considered.

One way to learn about making connections is to make some. Many fifth grade students and their teachers spend the year studying American history. A school librarian can serve as one of the weavers of a fabric created by a class and teacher studying the American frontier. It helps to approach the librarian before the school year starts, so she will have time to think, evaluate the school library's collection and plan. As a librarian, I began to develop a listing of materials that would be useful to teachers studying American history and the American frontier. I realized very early in my planning that the frontier moved westward as people moved West. What was considered "the frontier" in the 1600s and 1700s was well established "civilization" when gold was discovered at Sutter's mill in California in 1848. I also realized that with careful planning and a bit of creativity a class could begin their study of American history in September and cross the United States with the expanding frontier throughout the year. The class could use trade books and integrate language arts across the curriculum.

I like to include both fiction and non-fiction materials; fantasy (in the form of stories or legends, in poetry and in novels); literature (poetry, short stories and novels); literature which reflects the culture and history of Native Americans and immigrants from all over the world; and always a touch of humor. I recognize that not all children have the same reading abilities or interests. I tried to develop a varied list featuring materials for students with a wide range of reading abilities; from many cultures whose histories span centuries; and whose interests range from romance to fantasy to adventure to science.

Although librarians frequently "know their collections," because they use them and build them, no librarian knows every book, every piece of material. I began by looking through Exciting, Funny, Short, Different, and Sad Books Kids Like About Animals, Science, Sports, Families, Songs, and Other Things by Frances Laverne Carroll and Mary Meacham. It is an excellent resource created by librarians and published by the American Library Association. It provides a topical listing with brief annotations.

A librarian builds a collection by using such reviewing sources as: Children's Catalog, The Horn Book, Booklist, Top of the News, Bulletin for the Center for Children's Books, Library Journal and/or School Library Journal. Language Arts, The Web and Reading Teacher may also be useful. Suggestions made by children and teachers are always welcome. Children's literature texts such as Through the Eyes of a Child by Donna E. Norton and Children's Literature in the Elementary School by Charlotte Huck are also useful both as sources of information and for topical lists of books.

After sharing the tentative list of materials with the teacher and receiving further suggestions from the teacher, the class should be consulted. Their interests, ideas and abilities should be considered and included as further planning takes place. Students interested in science and technology should be encouraged to look at how farming, medicine, etc. were practiced on the frontier, what changes occurred and how they are practiced now. A wealth of material on such subjects can be found within the non-fiction section of a school library. It should be discovered, included, shared and enjoyed.

A teacher might also consider deriving the weekly spelling words and vocabulary lists from the reading and writing the class is sharing. A basic list may come from the spelling program and be augmented by the reading and writing.

Should a particular book be a favorite of the teacher or a student, it is acceptable for the teacher to read it aloud to the class. (This can be done with a book that is beyond the reading ability of some of the members of the class, but is such a wonderful book that the teacher wishes to share it.) The excitement and joy that comes with sharing a favorite book can be infectious. Reading can become "the thing to do."

The children and teacher can use their logs to record comments on their learning and their reading. The comments can be used to guide the teacher in lesson planning and in future use of materials. It would be

helpful to share some of the information on what materials were useful and interesting with the librarian.

I also feel that children are interested in the people who write the books they read and how those authors wrote the books. Lee Bennett Hopkins has written two books (Books Are By People and More Books Are By People) which feature interviews with authors. The Horn Book and Language Arts also have articles by and about authors that can be shared with children. (If a teacher or librarian discovers materials by and about children's authors, it may be helpful to make a copy of the articles to file and share with other students.) If the sources are made available to children, they may be encouraged to read and share the things they've discovered. School and public libraries also have other sources of biographical information.

I have developed a bibliography of books about the frontier. It contains notations which indicate reading level, interest level and whether the book is fiction, non-fiction, legend or folktale, poetry, adventure, humor or fantasy. It is the obligation of each teacher and/or librarian to examine the books to determine suitability. My list is still growing and will continue to grow. Making connections and retaining the fabric of a curriculum are not accomplished in a single stroke or even in a single year, but develop, change and evolve over time. One strand often leads to including another element in the fabric. New materials are published each year. I try to read such journals as Horn Book and Language Arts and take note of what may be suitable. I also enjoy listening to what children have to say about what they are reading. I use the children's ideas and responses to add color and texture to the fabric. The fabric on the loom will continue to grow and change. The weaving can be shared by anyone.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: THE FRONTIER

Key to Notations:

L	Legend or folktale
P	Poetry
A	Adventure (may include mystery)
H	Humor
+	Fiction
N+	Non-fiction
F	Fantasy

After each title an indication of interest level (I) by age and/or reading level (R) is listed. These are merely suggestions. They are not written in stone.

N+ Anderson, Joan. Christmas on the Prairie. Clarion/Houghton, 1985. (I: 9-12).

N+ Anderson, Joan. The First Thanksgiving Feast. Clarion/Houghton, 1984. (I: 9-12).

A Archer, Marion Fuller. Nine Lives of Moses on the Oregon Trail. Albert Whitman, 1968. (I: 9-12).

L Baker, Olaf. Where the Buffaloes Begin. Frederic Warne, 1981. (I: 8+; R: 5+).

L/P Baylor, Byrd. Hawk, I'm Your Brother. Charles Scribner's, 1976. (I: All).

P Baylor, Byrd. The Other Way to Listen. Charles Scribner's, 1978. (I: All).

P Behn, Harry. The Golden Hive. Harcourt, 1966. (I: All).

P Belting, Natalia, ed. Our Fathers Had Powerful Songs. Dutton, 1974. (I: All).

+ Blos, Joan W. A Gathering of Days. A New England Girl's Journal, 1830-32. Scribner's, 1979. (I: 8-14; R: 5+).

+ Bohner, Charles. Bold Journey: West with Lewis and Clark. Houghton-Mifflin, 1985. (R: 6-Young Adult).

F/L Bowman, James Cloyd. Pecos Bill. Little-Brown, 1957. (I: 9-12).

+ Brink, Carol Ryrie. Caddie Woodlawn: A Frontier Story. Macmillan, 1935. (I: 8-12; R: 5-6).

+/A Byars, Betsy. Trouble River. Viking, 1969. (I: 10-12).

+ Clapp, Patricia. Constance: A Story of Early Plymouth. Lothrup, Lee, and Shepard, 1968. (I: 9+; R: 5+).

+ Clapp, Patricia. I'm Deborah Sampson: A Soldier in the War of Revolution. Lothrop, Lee, and Shepard, 1977. (I: 9+; R: 5+).

+ Conrad, Pam. Prairie Songs. Harper, 1985. (I: 9-12).

+ Dalgliesh, Alice. The Courage of Sarah Noble. Scribner's, 1954. (I: 6-9; R: 3).

+ Field, Rachel. Calico Bush. Macmillan, 1931, 1966. (I: 9+; R: 5-6).

P Fleming, Alice, ed. America Is Not All Traffic Lights: Poems of the Midwest. Little-Brown, 1976. (I: All).

+/H Fleischman, Sid. By the Great Horn Spoon. Little-Brown, 1976. (I: 9+; R: 5+).

+/H Fleischman, Sid. Mr. Mysterious and Co. Little-Brown, 1962. (I: 9+; R: 5+).

+ Flory, Jane. The Golden Venture. Houghton-Mifflin, 1976. (I: 9+; R: 5+).

N+ Freedman, Russell. Cowboys of the Wild West. Clarion/Houghton, 1985. (I: 7-11).

N+ Fritz, Jean. And Then What Happened, Paul Revere? Putnam, 1973. (I: 7-10; R: 4+).

+ Fritz, Jean. The Cabin Faced West. Macmillan, 1973. (I: 7-10; R: 4+).

N+ Fritz, Jean. The Double Life of Pocahontas. Putnam, 1983. (I: 8-12; R: 4+).

N+ Fritz, Jean. Make Way for Sam Houstan. Putnam, 1986. (I: 9-12; R: 4+).

N+ Fritz, Jean. Traitor: The Case of Benedict Arnold. Putnam, 1981. (I: 8-12; R: 4+).

N+ Fritz, Jean. What's the Big Idea, Ben Franklin? Coward-McCann, 1978. (I: 7-12; R: 4+).

N+ Fritz, Jean. Where Do You Think You're Going, Christopher Columbus? Putnam, 1980. (I: 7-12; R: 4+).

N+ Fritz, Jean. Where Was Patrick Henry on the 29th of May? Coward-McCann, 1975. (I: 7-10; R: 4+).

N+ Fritz, Jean. Why Don't You Get a Horse, Sam Adams? Coward-McCann, 1974. (I: 7-10; R: 4+).

N+ Fritz, Jean. Will You Sign Here, John Hancock? Coward-McCann, 1976. (I: 7-10; R: 4+).

+/A George, Jean Craighead. River Rats, Inc. Dutton, 1979. (I: 10+; R: 6+).

N+ Gibbons, Gail. From Path to Highway: The Story of the Boston Post Road. Crowell, 1986. (I: 7-10).

N+ Glazer, Tom. A New Treasury of Folk Songs. Bantam, 1961.

L Gobel, Paul. The Gift of the Sacred Dog. Bradbury, 1980. (I: All; R: 5+).

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N+ Grant, Bruce. Famous American Trails. Rand-McNally, 1971. (I: All).

F/L Hamilton, Virginia, reteller. The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales. Knopf, 1985. (I: 9 to adult).

+ Hancock, Sibyl. Old Blue. Putnam, 1980. (I: 7-9; R: 3+).

A/+ Henry, Marguerite. San Domingo: The Mexican Hat Stallion. Rand-McNally, 1972. (I: 9-14; R: 4+).

N+ Holling, Holling Clancy. Tree in the Trail. Houghton, 1942. (I: 9+; R: 4+).

P Jones, Hettie. The Trees Stand Shining: Poetry of the North American Indians. Dial, 1971. (I: All).

H/L Kellogg, Steven. Paul Bunyan. William Morrow, 1984. (I: All; R: 3).

N+ Kurelek, William. They Sought a New World: The Story of European Immigration to North America. Tundra, 1985. (I: 7-10).

P Livingston, Myra Cohn. Thanksgiving Poems. Holiday, 1985. (I: 7-10).

F/A/+ Lunn, Janet. The Root Cellar. Penguin, 1985. (I: 10+; R: 5+).

N+ McClung, Robert M. The True Adventures of Grizzly Adams. Morrow, 1985. (I: 9+).

N+ McGraw, Jessie Brewer. Chief Red Horse Tells About Custer: The Battle of Little Bighorn--An Eyewitness Account Told in Indian Sign Language. Elsevier/Nelson, 1981. (I: 8+).

+ McLachlan, Patricia. Sarah, Plain and Tall. Harper, 1985. (I: 8+; R: 3+).

N+ Marrin, Albert. War Clouds in the West: Indians and Cavalrymen 1860-1890. Atheneum, 1985. (I: 10+).

+ Morrow, Honore. On to Oregon! William Morrow, 1926, 1948, 1954. (I: 10+; R: 5+).

A/+ O'Dell, Scott. Streams to the River, River to the Sea: A Novel of Sacagawea. Houghton, 1986. (I: 12 to adult).

N+ Patent, Dorothy Hinshaw. Buffalo: The American Bison Today. Clarion/Houghton, 1986. (I: 9-12).

H/L Peck, Leigh. Pecos Bill and Lightning. Houghton, 1940. (I: 9+).

N+ Sandburg, Carl. The American Songbag. Harcourt, 1927. (I: All).

N+ Showers, Paul. Indian Festivals. Crowell, 1969. (I: 7-10; R: 3).

+ Sneve, Virginia Driving Hawk. High Elk's Treasure. Holiday House, 1972. (I: 8-12; R: 5+).

+ Sneve, Virginia Driving Hawk. When Thunder Spoke. Holiday House, 1974. (I: 8-12; R: 4+).

A/+ Speare, Elizabeth. The Sign of the Beaver. Houghton, 1983. (I: 9-12; R: 5+).

A/+ Steele, William O. The Man with Silver Eyes. Harcourt, 1976. (I: 9-12; R: 5+).

\+ Turner, Ann. Dakota Dugout. Macmillan, 1985. (I: 9-12).

\+ Turner, Ann. Third Girl from the Left. Macmillan, 1986. (I: 12 to young adult).

\+ Wilder, Laura Ingalls. The Little House in the Big Woods. Harper, 1932. (I: 8-12; R: 4+).

N+ Yates, Elizabeth. We the People. Regional Center for Educational Training, 1974. (I: 8-12; R: 4).

I have not included many titles which deal with the American Civil War. There are many excellent books which deal with the issues, heroes and heroines, the "common man," slavery or are works of fiction set at that time. Please consult your local public or school librarian for help in locating them.

Jean Myers Stevenson, a doctoral candidate in Elementary Education/Teacher Education, is a former children's librarian and storyteller. She is the mother of three elementary school age children. Jean is currently doing a practicum in two elementary school classrooms and doing research in children's literature and the writing process.